

April 27, 2009

Swine Flu Laboratory Update #2

Dear Colleagues:

Due to the rapidly growing requests for swine flu testing, the Bureau of Laboratories (BOL) is immediately limiting swine flu testing to specimens from individuals who meet the swine flu suspect case definition. Local health departments and the Bureau of Epidemiology (BOE) will confirm that the case meets this epidemiologic definition and notify BOL of testing approval. To clarify from our communiqué of April 24, **please do not submit all rapid flu positive samples to the BOL; testing must be pre-approved.** To expedite testing for suspect cases, please encourage clinicians to work with the local health department before specimens are shipped to BOL. If specimens are sent to a reference laboratory for testing, the submitting clinician will still need to work with local public health before BOL testing will proceed. When specimens are approved for testing, they are to be shipped directly to the BOL. A Swine Influenza Testing Algorithm is posted on the HAN and on the BOL website www.michigan.gov/mdchlab (under Guidelines for Labs). **Normal seasonal influenza testing surveillance activities will be suspended for the time being.**

Nasopharyngeal (NP) swabs or aspirates are the specimen of choice, and should be sent in viral transport. If viral transport is not available, the specimen may be submitted in 3ml sterile physiologic saline. If a rapid Flu test will be performed, a separate swab should be collected for that test. Specimen collection kits are being distributed today to Regional Epidemiologists and Regional Immunization Coordinators. Later this week we hope to distribute collection kits more broadly. Specimens may be shipped as a Biologic Substance, Category B specimen with a cold pack. They can be shipped via USPS Express Mail or commercial carrier or courier. Again, your local health department working with the BOE can facilitate transport arrangements, if needed.

We do not require that a rapid flu test be performed before submitting a specimen, but a positive result can be used to direct patient care, to determine the need for administration of antiviral agents that may diminish viral shedding, and to direct infection control activities. Specimens with a rapid flu A positive result may be given priority by local health and BOE.

As a clarification on PPE recommendations, the use of N-95 fit-tested mask, goggles, gloves and gown are appropriate for routine specimen collection; use of a biological safety cabinet is recommended by CDC for all sample manipulations.

We again recommend specimens from suspect cases, whether rapid test positive or negative, **not be inoculated to viral cell culture.** (Specimen transport in viral transport media is distinct from culture.) This aspect of the algorithm for novel influenza strains protects from the unwitting amplification of a strain that could prove hazardous for laboratorians and the community.

Testing will begin every weekday at the BOL on specimens that have been received by 8:00 A.M., with results reported by 4:00 P.M. Meeting these time frames will depend upon the volume of testing experienced.

Events are moving very quickly and we will try to clarify issues as soon as they arise. Our phone lines are very busy, and a prompt response may be delayed, so email your concerns and questions to: Dr Anthony Muyombwe (muyombwea@michigan.gov) or Patty Clark (clarkp@michigan.gov).